15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

I. Setting and Economic Background of Sohkynduh and Kongton

Sohkynduh and Kongton are villages of the Kadashinong,[1] one of the areas under the Cherra Chief. The Kadashinong is situated on the southern slope of the Khasi Hills, in what is called War country. These two villages are situated at the farthest point from both Shella, the centre bordered by the plain, and Cherrapunjee, the seat of the Cherra Chief, one of the centres of the upland Khasi Hills. The people at Cherrapunjee say that these villages are one of the most backward parts of the Khasi Hills. They correspond to Rombagiri in the Garo Hills, as they lie in the innermost parts and more traditional economic and social settings have been preserved there than in other villages. These are also the reasons why I selected those villages as my field.

It is nine miles to Sohkynduh from Cherrapunjee, crossing two deep valleys towards the east. Kongton is located at the heart of the mountain ranges, ten miles from Cherrapunjee, towards the north-east. It is about twelve miles from Sohkynduh to Kongton, and the way leads through one of the most difficult passes, where even villagers seldom travel. In December, 1955, Sohkynduh was a community of 48 households (List 6), and Kongton of 62 households (List 5). The settlements of both villages are clustered in the southern depressions of a mountain, not far from the summit, a typical location of Khasi villages. Sohkynduh has poor soil, covered with plenty of pieces of stones. The yield therefore is very poor. On the other hand, Kongton, a much older village, enjoys fertile soil, and is one of the most prosperous communities in the Kadashinong.

The major economy of both villages is shifting cultivation. We have already seen, in the chapters on the Garo, the fundamental technique of "jhuming cultivation." The differences between the Garo and this Khasi shifting cultivation are to be found in two aspects: one is the nature of the crops and the other is the type of landownership. In this area, the main crop is millet, while that of the Garo is rice. Besides the shifting cultivation, *the Khasi have pan-leaf gardens* and sometimes pineapple gardens, though on a small scale and not in every household. The most important feature of Khasi shifting cultivation is the development of private ownership. In the tribal areas in Assam, such private ownership of the jhum field is quite an

1. Kadashinong is the name of a group of villages. Its literal meaning is "twelve villages," and it comprises the following villages: Sohkynduh, Rymmai, Mawlaweem, Mawshlut, Mawmang, Kongton, Shyntiang, Krohiawblur, Pilet, Tendon, Nongpriang, and Dongmaw. (Khasi spelling follows the customary usage in Cherra State.)

15: Nakane E5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

APPENDIX

SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM SHELLA AND JATINGA

Shella

Shella is situated on the lowest of the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills, bordering on the Sylhet plain of East Pakistan. For centuries the people of Shella maintained close trading connections with the people of the plain, so that they have been much influenced by the Hindu. They have been to some extent divorced economically and culturally from their own people who live in the uplands and o higher part of the slopes. Actually, this is a natural result of their geographical location. From Cherrapunjee, the southern edge of the upland Khasi Hill, only a narrow footpath goes down to Shella. The altitude of Cherrapunjee is about 3,000 feet and of Shella from 500 to 1,000 feet, and the distance between them is 8 miles. The path descends very steeply and is full of hard stones. This difficulty of communication is also why the Hindu influence did not penetrate the upland Khasi, as in the case of the Jaintia Hills.[1]

This area has a unique political organization which differs from the majority of Khasi states who is traditionally ruled by the members of the Syiem clan. Shella is organized as confederation, called 'Shella Confederacy,' and consists of four local villages. The head of the village is called sordarbar, and is elected by the villagers every three years. The number of households of the Shella Confederacy was about 500 in January 1956. The names of the four villages and their sordarbar in 1956 were:

	Name of village	Name of sordarbar
1.	Shella	Dewlah Mohan Roy
2.	Mankhah	Dhirjen Roy
3.	Nongtrai	Orja Roy
4.	Tyngngar	Jubraj Roy

Each village is divided into sections. For instance, Shella village has nine sections: (1) Jaoir, (2) Dieng, (3) Dohs, (4) Jamon, (5) Nongrum, (6) Nongsong,

1. However, Shella was the only way out and the main gateway from the Khasi Hills to the plain, it was here that the British first entered the Khasi Hills. They proceeded from Shella to Cherrapunjee and made the latter headquarters of the Khasi Hills in 1833.

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

STATISTICAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS.

THE DISTRICT OF THE KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS, called by the inhabitants Ka Ri Khási and Ka Ri Synteng, is situated between 25° 9' 30" and 25° 8' 18" north latitude, and between 91° 5' 0" and 92° 31' 30" east longitude. It contains an approximate area of 6,133 square miles, and a population, according to the Census of 1872, of 121,838 souls. The principal town and Civil Station, which is also the headquarters of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, is Shillong, situated in 25° 31' 35" north latitude and 91° 55' 30" east longitude.

BOUNDARIES.—The Khási and Jáintia Hills District is bounded on the north by the Districts of Kámrúp and Nowgong; on the east by Northern Cáchár, the Nága Hills District, and the Kapili river; on the south by Sylhet District; and on the west by the Gáro Hills.

JURISDICTION.—The Khási and Jáintia Hills constitute a Political District, removed from the jurisdiction of the ordinary Criminal, Civil, and Revenue Courts, and of the officers established under the General Regulations and Acts. The administration of the country is vested in the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Deputy-Commissioner of the Khási and Jáintia Hills and his Assistants, and the native Chiefs, who are variously styled Siems, Wáhadádárs, Sardárs, Dollois, Pathárs, and Lyngkhás. Siem, or more properly Sem, is derived from the Khási word for 'soul, life;' Wáhadádár, from the Hindu term ahádádár, meaning an 'officer;' Lyngkhá strictly means a 'meritorial workmanper,' from the Khási ang, 'to speak,' and khá, 'flesh.' The District is divided into thirty parganas, —namely, British possessions in the Khási Hills; petty dependent

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

disfigured from the practice. Adults will chew as many as four or five betel-nuts a day, with the usual accompaniment of *pán* leaves. The estimated cost of maintaining an average family of the labouring class is about Rs. 8 or 16s. a month. 976 [434]

Towns: Shillong.—There are no towns in the usual acceptance of the word; but the chief places in the Hills, looked upon by the inhabitants as cities, are Shillong, Jowái, Cherrá Púnjí, and Shellá. According to the Census of 1871, Shillong had only 1363 inhabitants, Cherrá Púnjí 443, and Jowái 4302. Jowái, however, is a collection of rural hamlets, and the population of Shillong has entirely altered since the date of the Census. The latter place first became the Civil Station in 1864, in substitution for Cherrá Púnjí; and when Assam was erected into an independent Province in 1874, it was selected as the permanent seat of the Local Government. The Chief Commissioner resides there, and also the heads of all departments in the Administration. The area of the Station is 3 miles in length by 1½ to 1¾ miles in breadth. A considerable native population is already settled, and is increasing from day to day. One of the largest weekly markets in held in the Aitár; and with a view to facilitate access to the Station, which is the sanitarium for the Province of Assam, a cart road has recently been completed to Gauhátí on the Brahmaputra, which will tend to make the place more and more important. An excellent water supply is introduced into Shillong through an aqueduct which has its source in the neighbouring hill streams, and sanitary measures are carefully enforced. Large sums of money have annually been expended on the erection of the public buildings necessary for the offices of the administration. A printing-press has been established, from which issue all the official documents and reports of the Province. The climate is excellent, the temperature being more equable than that of any other hill station in India, and therefore admirably suited to the constitution of Europeans. There is a church at Shillong, and a chaplain on the Bengal establishment officiates both there and at Gauhátí. The cantonments were occupied in 1875 by the 42d Regiment of Assam Light Infantry, with three outposts. The strength was 9 European officers, 16 native commissioned officers, 80 non-commissioned officers, 711 fighting men, and 58 paid camp followers and non-combatants; grand total, 933. The total cost, including contingencies, was Rs. 1,83,190, or £18,319. 632 • 632 648 [643] [743] [991] [365] [364] [349] [218] [182] [346] [712]